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# AMERICA'S OPPORTUNITY AND OBLIGATION IN THE PRESENT CRISIS

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AN ADDRESS

BY

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the boiling caldron of venomous hate. It is easy to let one's self go and in an unholy, vengeance-is-mine spirit condemn some one, not one's self, to everlasting perdition, or at the very least to urge that somebody be punished. Moreover, it is hard to stop with condemning the sin. We like to be concrete and point finger at the man. Then hot anger—commonly called righteous indignation—begins to boil.

To approach the question dispassionately, there are certain fundamental facts to be noted. First, after the war is over the several nations involved will continue to exist. There is no such thing as putting any one of them out of the way, whatever may be done to their governments or to boundary lines. In other words, they will have to live together in the world. Europe understands this better than we do. Second, each nation holds certain preconceived notions of government, of the social order, of justice, of the relation between the civil and military arms of government. These concepts are inborn and inbred. Almost all of them are rooted in the experiences and traditions of the centuries. They may be right or they may be wrong; who shall say? Reason dictates that in our dealings with one another these differences be taken into account in a spirit of tolerance. Moreover, experience proves that these inborn political beliefs can be changed only from within. Pressure from without invariably strengthens them. Third, for nearly two thousand years all the nations of the west have drawn their inspiration from the same religious source. This is the most important fact of all. It is expressed in all the ways in which



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men and nations deal with one another. It has touched life on every side and strengthened the bonds between men in every relation, political, economic, social. In other words, the influences which unite the nations of the west are more vital to western civilization than those which tend to drive them apart. That is why the present war is so furious, so deadly, so utterly appalling. In some of its aspects it is civil war. The protagonists in this fearful tragedy claim to uphold the same standards. Each believes itself to be the best type of the same civilization. Prejudice may revolt against this statement but reason will carry the day. Therefore, it may be set down as fundamental that the great powers must all be included in any arrangement the object of which is to preserve western civilization. Any attempt to leave one of them out is bound to result in failure.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to adopt some view of the conclusion of hostilities as a premise. I assume the following:

(1) That neither the United States nor any other important neutral power will have been drawn into the war;

(2) That neither side will be utterly crushed, but that each belligerent will be able to resume a normal national life.

The question based upon these assumptions amounts to this: If the war were stopped today, what international agreements ought we or the nations immediately involved to strive for? That depends in part upon what one conceives to be the ultimate goal of organized society. There was a time not many generations ago when men thought

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as well as fought in small groups,—the tribe, the clan, and by and by the narrow feudal state claimed the whole allegiance of men. Gradually the idea of nationality emerged. Patriotism took on a new and wider meaning. We are now entering upon a new stage of development. To those who cannot see beyond the present boundaries of states and empires, any international arrangement which lowers by an inch the invisible barriers that separate nations would be a mistake, and any attempt to establish freedom of intercourse such as exists between our several states would be regarded at best as chimerical. To such as these, the federation of the world is a mistaken ideal or if it is really the goal it is so far off that its existence or non-existence can have no practical bearing upon present international arrangements. I do not share this view. Out of this war is bound to come a clearer vision of international relations carrying with it a sense of allegiance to a power above the sovereignty we now recognize. We may refuse to behold the vision; we may ruthlessly blot it out, or we may direct our steps forward toward its realization. We shall not arrive all at once, but the idea will emerge and the vision become a reality by slow stages exactly as in the case of nationalism.

It does not follow that nationality will become a thing of the past. All that is good in national life, all that has added to the sum of human happiness, all that has proved effective in the conduct of affairs, will be preserved to strengthen and enrich the life of the larger group to which the several states will belong. Each will be strengthened in respect to those powers which make for the well

being of men, and those are the only powers worth preserving.

Meanwhile we must live in the world as it is. It would be futile to make arrangements based upon conditions that do not yet exist, but it will be a crime against civilization to proceed on the assumption that whatever is right and will not change, that nationality is the last word in political science.

With this view of the growth of organized society as the corner-stone of our political faith, it is clear that we dare not take one irretrievable step away from the goal of internationality. Doubtless we shall stumble and wander out of the right path. That is inevitable, for it does not yet appear what exactly the international arrangement will be, but our stumblings will not take us far wrong if we keep in mind the purpose to get away from a *selfish* nationality and to move toward a broader and more inclusive state in which national rights shall correspond more nearly to national obligations. The goal may be far away. The road thither is under our feet. This much we can see with a fair degree of clearness. The new relation between states will necessarily take somewhat from the sovereignty of each, at least in practical result. No nation can henceforth be a law unto itself or, if the old formula is insisted upon, each exercising its sovereign power will choose to do that which all agree it ought to do.

But already we have overcome that difficulty. When a sovereign state enters into a treaty with another sovereign state each surrenders something. Thenceforth neither is as free to act as it was before.

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Internationality is therefore no new thing. The principle is already established. The question is merely whether its extension is now feasible. Public men are beginning to say that it is, that some form of international unity must be arranged, that the time has come when we can and must set up an international tribunal whose decrees can be enforced. The responsible spokesmen of England and Germany warrant expectation of accomplishment. Each declares it to be the purpose of his government to establish a permanent peace, not a temporary, patched-up affair. Each glowers at the other and regards all enemy utterances with suspicion. Nevertheless, the two are talking about the same thing and expressing much the same hope. Each sees a new Europe, though neither admits that *his* empire is or ought to be changed. "The peace which shall end this war shall be a lasting peace. It must not bear the germ of new wars but must provide for a peaceful arrangement of European questions." Thus spoke the Chancellor in the Reichstag on April 5 of this year. On the week following Mr. Asquith said: "As a result of the war we intend to establish the principle that international problems must be handled by free negotiation, on equal terms, between free peoples." How this desirable condition is to be established is the question. Mr. Asquith answers it by proposing to destroy the military domination of Prussia. "These negotiations," he asserts, "shall no longer be hampered or swayed by the overmastering dictation of a government controlled by a military caste." On the other hand, the Chancellor would "create a Germany so firmly united, so strongly protected,

that no one ever will feel the temptation to annihilate it." Here truly is an impasse. Germany by making herself invincible, England by reducing Germany to impotence, would insure "the free exercise of peaceful endeavors"!

Inasmuch as England demands that something be done to Germany, the burden certainly rests upon England to state exactly what she proposes. Inflammatory speakers like the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Hughes, would inaugurate a trade war on the heels of the war of arms. What Mr. Hughes says is important only because he has been formally admitted to a meeting of the British Cabinet and because his speeches are stirring up the English people to demand the "iron band" of their government. More important are the remarks of Mr. Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, who, speaking of Germany's economic future is quoted as saying from the Treasury bench, that, after the war, Germany must not be allowed to "get her head up." Proposals of that kind are the extreme of foolishness. If put into execution they might hinder, but they could not prevent the industrial progress of Germany. The ultimate loss would fall upon England and her Allies. The only ones to benefit by such an arrangement would be the neutral nations taking over the trade with Germany. But Mr. Asquith frowns upon these fiery proposals. He expressly repudiates the suggestion that Great Britain entered the war "to strangle Germany or to wipe her off the map of Europe," or "to destroy or mutilate her national life." His purpose is to destroy the military domination of Prussia, but he does not tell us how he

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proposes to do it. Mr. Asquith chooses his words nicely. He does not talk of Prussian militarism, for he doubtless understands that it is not different in *kind* from the militarism of any other people. The important word in his declaration of purpose is "domination." The British Empire, relying chiefly upon the English navy, proposes to *continue* to be the dominating influence in European affairs. The German Empire, relying chiefly upon the Prussian army, proposes to *become* the dominating influence. Each believes the world will be benefited if it succeeds. But this merely brings us back to the impasse.

There are only two ways of overcoming the deadlock without destroying one or other of the opposing forces. One way is to divide the coveted power, the domination; the other is to abandon it altogether. To attempt to pursue the first course would not be acceptable to the rest of Europe. Certainly each of the great powers would demand a share of the divided domination. Why not then take the words of Mr. Asquith and the Chancellor literally with all their implications and definitely abandon the balance of power theory, and in its place set up the theory of a concert of nations. The difference is as wide as the poles. The Balance of Power in 1914 (not the theory as propounded by the seventeenth century writers) meant repression and prevention of growth lest one nation become too strong. A Concert of Powers means cooperation among nations not only for mutual protection but that each may grow and develop according to the nature and genius of its people. A union of this kind is positive, not negative. It is possible

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only among nations actuated by the same great motives. It will succeed only when the nations great and small place themselves upon a footing of political equality. The attempt to unite for protection alone is doomed to failure. It would leave standing the old national ambitions and rivalries. As the *London Nation* remarked at the beginning of the war: "Between the theory of the Balance and the theory of a Concert there is an absolute contradiction."

In the progress of the ages aggressive alliances have become abhorrent. This war has revealed the fact that defensive alliances lead to aggressive measures. The time has come to try the experiment of a Concert of Powers, to promote the welfare of men and nations. The opinion of the world is rapidly concentrating upon this point, and though we have not yet found the word to express the gathering force of internationality, we feel the presence of it as of something real and imminent. We are restive when governments talk of dictating terms to one another and are moved to repudiate domination, whether of our own or of another government, as inconsistent with equal and just laws, equally enforced.

The program of the League to Enforce Peace is the most promising of several having this end in view. The League seeks to conserve civilization and the progress of mankind by agreement among the nations. It proposes to set up certain international tribunals and to use its joint economic and military forces against any of its number that goes to war or commits acts of hostility against another member before submitting the controversy as provided. The League also proposes conferences

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between the Powers from time to time, to formulate and codify rules of international law.

These aims are excellent. The League commands my hearty support. But the nations must go further if the Concert is to produce harmony and not discord. The constructive purpose and nature of the new international arrangement must be clearly understood. The feature most likely to encounter prejudice has already been pointed out, namely, the subordination of national power when national ambitions run counter to the general welfare as determined by the international tribunals to be set up. Hardly less difficult is the question of equality of political power between the nations, but it is essential to the arrangement. Unless the principle of equality is established, the words of Mr. Asquith and the Chancellor have no meaning. There can be no "free negotiations on equal terms," no "free exercise of peaceful endeavors." As long as the claims of the great powers are recognized as superior, one great power will view with suspicion the influence of another great power over the destinies of the little states.

The only hope of the little state lies in the adoption of the principle of equality. This also is the hope of western civilization, for the little states are bones of contention.

The principle of equality may not be accepted willingly or quickly. It is wise to make haste slowly. But effective progress can be made toward the goal if the powers will commit themselves to the policy of working toward uniform laws governing such matters as immigration, naturalization, citizenship and international trade.



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If the treaty-makers approach their task in this spirit—and it does not seem to me impossible—the question of boundaries will become secondary and will be disposed of without resort to arms. Whoever is left or placed in control of disputed territory at the close of the war should agree to act as trustee until specified conditions have been carried out and then to surrender the trust to the permanent government agreed upon. Our withdrawal from Cuba furnishes a precedent.

In all this the United States should agree to participate. A great moment in our history will have arrived. We shall have opportunity to assist in no less an enterprise than the inauguration of a new era and we should bear a generous part of the burden which must be assumed by stricken Europe. We may be able to hasten the day of reconciliation by making our proffer of assistance conditional upon the abandonment of the old spirit of selfish nationalism and cheese-paring diplomacy. With the preservation of the Balance of Power, whether on sea or land, the United States is not concerned, save only to insist with equal emphasis to *all* offenders, English as well as German, that our rights shall not be invaded. But to take part in inaugurating and maintaining an international program of progress based on the mutual welfare of states and the common interests of mankind is in keeping with our traditions and the spirit of our institutions.













